

February 7, 2011

To Members of the Environment Committee and my Congressmen and women, respectively, we would like to express our opposition to Senate Bill 830.

First, allow me to preface this letter by informing you all of the irony of events that have taken place over the life span (to date) of my Connecticut business.

Built in approximately 1910 primarily through manual labor, this three story wooden structure was designed to be heated with the most readily available and economically used heat source of the era: wood. Now, one hundred years later, we have come full circle.

Our store has managed to survive depressions, wars, recessions, local and state regulations, zoning laws, politics and \$100.00/ barrel oil.

And only since the installation of our outdoor wood furnace has this building seen a comfortable 68 degrees.

Today I write to you to ask that you not even consider the newly drafted ban on outdoor wood furnaces except if used for agricultural or farming purposes, or any further legislation concerning limiting where and when they can be used, or whether or not the smoke they emit is more of a 'nuisance' than that of any other wood stove.

Instead I respectfully ask that you educate yourselves on the subject of outdoor wood furnaces. I ask that you research the numerous laws already on the books, local, state and federal (see Ct. DEP PA 05-227) that already address and regulate where and how an outdoor boiler can be placed, and the proper operating instructions.

I also ask that before you consider passing legislation that will most likely not effect you and your comfortable, convenient delivery of foreign oil, that you will seek out some of us: owners and operators of wood boilers that don't offend anyone in day to day practices and co-exist peaceably with neighbors—some of whom burn wood, some who don't and many that wish they could.

The media today loves conflict—they love to report on issues that give way to emotional testimonies—but largely the facts are ignored. I must ask who initiated this bill? Many who use these furnaces operate commercial businesses within this state, and although support the farming community whole heartedly, would find it difficult to now meet the states requirements for a 'farm'. What more will you do to us, struggling to keep our businesses heated? Have you even considered a "field trip" to members of any one Connecticut community to speak with us? Or our neighbors? Do you realize that not all neighbors of those of us that use these units argue? Has anyone bothered to address how much of a health hazard is created in equal BTU amounts from start to finish of any one of the following heat sources: oil, coal, gas, electricity, etc.

What about nuclear power plants? The barges for the oil tankers? The trucks on our roads delivering oil to Ct. homes? None of those types of pollutants are on the floor to be banned, not even partially? Maybe just during the summer months we could ban the oil trucks from Ct. roads... we don't need to wash dishes or take showers in the summer... How many residences and businesses will be effected by your actions here today, solely because they're not farmers?

Please take a moment to understand: a compromise here is ludicrous. This topic of banning our tax paying citizen's heat sources, even partially, should not even be being discussed.

Can I remind everyone that the burning of wood pollutes very little from stand to stove—all of the above mentioned sources would expel more pollutants just getting it from point A to point B. Most of us harvest our own firewood from woodlots passed on from our ancestors or farmland we have bought and groomed over our own lifespan, supporting an agricultural industry within Connecticut, to provide for our families use. We use our own energy to get the trees down into suitable forms for burning, as Americans have done for centuries, long before many of you were even born. Whether it be for the cook stove in the kitchen or the boiler outside—none of us are a drain on the system.

On January 10th 2009, my local paper reported a 7% increase over last winter in applications for heating assistance with the Ct. Energy Assistance Program and Contingency Heating Assistance Program: more than 57,400 households approved for basic benefits of up to \$880.00. ¹

Again, I ask you—can Connecticut's economy really afford even a partial ban, one that singles out a select group of citizens because of their line of work, on outdoor wood furnaces? Does the number of working persons this will affect evade you?

It matters little to me personally who uses these furnaces: farmers, business owners, homeowners, and homesteaders—we all need them for the sole purpose of cost effectively keeping warm. For this reason, we don't support exemptions for any one particular sector.

But, aside from that minor issue of heat, and the logging industry being a huge agricultural boost for Ct.'s defunct economy, could you please consider all the people down the line your decisions will affect?

From manufacturing, to laborers, plumbers and electricians that install, to retailers that sell and service these units, to those of us who depend on them throughout cold New England winters.

It's a wood stove for Goodness sake. And it's outside. It's less of a risk for all involved because it's outdoors. Their efficiency stems from heating water that connects to an existing heating system (boiler) thus maintaining even heat throughout an entire home, not just one area or a small room such as an indoor wood stove or fireplace insert would do. We have managed to keep our families warm, keep a business open or keep a farm producing by not spending our meager earnings on oil, 70% of which comes here from overseas. ² We personally feel this is not a state issue, it is governed enough and any further regulation should be left to individual town governments. The state should not have the power to control our most cost effective and basic need of HEAT. Furthermore, DEP should not have un-limited reign to establish stricter regulations without answering to the people of Connecticut who employ them.

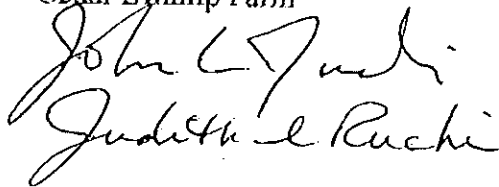
We are third generation business owners here in Connecticut, and we were brought up with the belief that as Americans, we are guaranteed Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness, and we are steadily losing confidence and morale. Continuously we are forced into a system that punishes for hard work and 'assists' those who will not work for their benefits. Perhaps instead of handing those in this state whom are cold an application for heating oil funds, a chainsaw and some matches should be considered.

Allow me to close this letter by stating the obvious: never did I dream when I installed my wood furnace that I'd be sitting here on a cold February day spending valuable time penning a letter asking congress not to ban my our only source of

heat and hot water for our business. If you push through a statewide ban, even a partial ban, you will greatly diminish our quality of life and ability to function, making a criminal out of me and many others, I'm sure, as we continue to use our furnaces. Perhaps our business will finally close, and more families will leave the state as the regulations grow governing what one can and cannot do. We can sell our farmland in the neighboring town where our residence is, yes, a farm, just not one where a furnace sits, to a developer who will pay top dollar for cropland that currently grows food, and he can attract city folks to the area that need a lot more services than we have ever asked for.

The state should be rewarding those of us who sustain ourselves, contribute to the economy, ask for nothing and are willing to work for our heat.

Sincerely,
John and Judi Rucki
Owners, Abington General Store
Cedar Swamp Farm

Handwritten signatures of John and Judi Rucki. The signature for John is written above the signature for Judi.

Source:

1. Norwich Bulletin via Ct. Dept. of Social Services
2. Pickensplan.com